



Asian Strategy & Leadership Institute
Dedicated To Creating A Better Society

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Good record, could be better

AS we approach the first anniversary of Pakatan Harapan winning the 14th General Election last year, it is natural to ask: How well has the government done?

Many Malaysians, if not most, would probably say that they have done well under trying circumstances but they could have done much better!

Most Malaysians – including, I'm sure, those in the Cabinet – didn't expect Pakatan to win, anyway. That is why the coalition boldly drew up an ambitious manifesto, which they are now finding difficult to fulfil.

However, in all fairness to the Pakatan government, its ministers, understandably, did not realise the huge rot that had set into the country's entire administrative system. The challenges are, inter alia, as follows:

- > Corruption that was rife from the top to the bottom of the last government, led, sadly, by some of the topmost leaders and officials themselves.

- > The bias and consequent professional weakening of the civil and public services caused by about 60 years of one political party's dominant rule.

- > Blind loyalty that had developed in many civil servants in service of party politics rather than following the time-tested traditional values of the civil service – that we faithfully serve God, King and Country with neutrality, intellectual integrity and a deep sense of honesty. Today, it may be somewhat different.

- > Cabinet ministers in the past were also, understandably, more experienced. They may have encouraged the growth of many

little Napoleons but they could control them. Today, however, many of the little Napoleons are resisting the less experienced ministers. The new Pakatan ministers must learn to better manage these little Napoleons or lose out!

- > Cronies were pervasive before, and their negative influence must be strongly resisted now to reduce the rot that has sunk into the administrative system. That is why the destructive practice of money politics has to be severely controlled soon.

For the above reasons, it is only fair and reasonable to give the Pakatan government more time to achieve more success and at a faster pace.

The reliable and recent Merdeka Survey shows that the public's rating of the government has declined. I believe the poor rating could be due to the following reasons:

- > Inadequate consultations with the public and with the opposition over, for instance, the ratification of the Rome Statute and other international conventions.

In fact, some ministries have been criticised for not taking the public and professionals into greater confidence before introducing important policies that could badly affect stakeholders.

Thus, there is consequent public rejection and resentment, which could have been avoided in the first place. A good example is the fuss over the essential teaching of the English language.

On the other hand, some policies that are in the best national and public interests have to be implemented with greater courage

and conviction.

Hence the public has to be assured that the full truth will be told about the alleged enforced disappearance of Malaysians. Fear is created and confidence suffers by playing down the Suhakam (Human Rights Commission of Malaysia) report on this sensitive security and public safety issue.

- > Foreign labour has been a source of sore concern for Malaysians and especially our labour movement. The unemployed also suffer due to past flip-flop labour policies.

Can't the government come out with more sustainable policies and practices to suit employers, employees and foreign workers as well?

- > The minimum wage could have been raised to RM1,500 a month much earlier rather than waiting and postponing the decision so many times.

Income disparities are widening here and all over the world, and the issue is causing much frustration and misery. Yet the government dragged its feet, giving the unfortunate impression that it is anti poor and labour and pro rich capitalists.

This is not right nor proper, and builds public resentment. It even nurtures social unrest and upheaval along with bad antisocial and dangerous elements that would be extremely difficult to control later.

Hence, we need to have a minimum wage that is adequate as a living wage as well before it's too late to prevent ugly developments.

- > The cost of living is high and rising. The government has to introduce an anti-inflation pack-

age to lower the cost of living as soon as possible.

The rakyat keep asking why so little has been done to lower the prices of at least basic goods and services consumed by the poor.

Can, for instance, the supply of food be increased by more competition and less protection? This act of encouraging more competition alone would help to lower rising prices.

We can understand the severe challenges faced by the new government after so many previous years of mismanagement, corruption, cronyism and waste of public funds.

Hence, it may be too much to expect a strong turnaround so soon. But where there is unfair resistance to transformation and change for the better, the government has to be tougher and forge ahead.

This is especially true when issues to do with race, religion and royalty are wrongly used to protect narrow vested interests.

Racism and religious bigotry should be resisted more strongly!

I am sure we all would appeal to the Pakatan government to move more resolutely to serve the righteous national and public interests of the rakyat, for which they will get better ratings from the public.

Then we will all, as Malaysians, be able to help build a better Malaysia with more peace, prosperity and national unity in the future.

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